

FINAL DRAFT , WG 1, 1/30/04

National Aquatic Animal Health Task Force - Meeting Report of Work Group 1

“Roles and responsibilities of aquatic animal health professionals”

SeaTac Holiday Inn, Seattle, WA. January 13-14, 2004

Introduction:

The National Aquatic Animal Health Task Force (*Task Force*) has been charged by the Joint Subcommittee on Aquaculture (JSA) to develop a national aquatic animal health plan (NAAHP). The purpose of NAAHP is to: provide safe, efficient, and predictable commerce for aquatic animals; protect farmed and wild aquatic animals from the import of foreign animal diseases and pests; meet the United States' national and international aquatic animal health legal obligations; and, ensure the availability of diagnostic and certification services for private, public, and tribal aquaculture. The Task Force decided to develop the various elements of the plan in a transparent and collaborative process with its many stakeholders. The Task Force will convene work groups, which represent a broad spectrum of experts, to provide input on the various topics/elements of NAAHP. The work groups are informal in structure and are not advisory groups nor are they operating under the rules of FACA. Discussions of the work groups will be captured in meeting reports such as this one. These reports will in turn be used to develop draft chapters of the plan. After approval by the Task Force, the draft chapters will be submitted to JSA and our stakeholders for comment. Eventually, the finalized chapters will be adopted by the Task Force as part of NAAHP.

The first group, Work Group 1 (WG 1), met on January 13, 2004, in Seattle, Washington. The purpose of WG 1 was to identify the types of aquatic animal health professionals needed today and in the future for aquaculture as identified by NAAHP. WG 1 used a ten to fifteen year future time frame for when the plan may be fully implemented and to adjust curricula accordingly to educate the needed professionals (see attached WG 1 agenda).

Participants:

Task Force: Marilyn Blair (US Fish and Wildlife Service), Jill Rolland and Bronte Williams (USDA/APHIS), and Kevin Amos (NOAA Fisheries).

Stakeholders: Roy Yanong, University of Florida; Kathleen Hartman, APHIS; Don Hoenig, American Veterinary Medical Association; Chris Wilson, Utah Natural Resources Dept.; Bruce Stewart, Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission; and, Carole Engle, University of Arkansas (she was unable to attend).

Discussion:

Day 1 - The first order of business was a welcome on behalf of the entire Task Force and introductions/backgrounds of the participants. Next, an explanation was given to WG 1 on the process of NAAHP development, process for identification of work group participants, and explanation of expectations of the work group. A proposed agenda was distributed and considered by the group. The group accepted the agenda as a guideline for deliberations. The first discussions focused on the types of professionals currently providing service to public and private aquaculture. Examples were given by the participants from their experiences. For private aquaculture, veterinarians appear to be the primary care providers responsible for disease diagnosis, prescribing treatments, and signing health certificates for exports. For public and tribal aquaculturists, there is a mix of veterinarians and non-veterinarians, many of whom are accredited by the American Fisheries Society, Fish Health Section. The National Poultry Improvement Plan (NPIP) was discussed as a model by which veterinarians and technicians work together with approved laboratories for the sample collection and testing of flocks. There seemed to be agreement that aspects of NPIP would work for NAAHP.

The training and credentials of veterinarians and AFS-accredited professionals was discussed. Veterinary schools train all students in the core sciences with focus on mammals. Some veterinary colleges have aquatics courses or rotations for students. New continuing education opportunities are being made available. Veterinarians must be licensed by states to practice on “animals”. Not all states recognize aquatic animals in the definition of “animals”, although they are included in the federal Animal Health Protection Act of 2002. To sign APHIS health certificates, a veterinarian must be USDA-accredited. Currently, the USDA/APHIS accreditation program lacks a requirement for training in aquatics. To become licensed, one must also pass national boards which now have a few questions on aquatics. States have the ability to remove a license if the veterinarian has been found to commit an illegal act. The same can happen in regards to USDA-accreditation. There is not currently a “board “ recognition for the aquatic

specialty.

AFS/Fish Health Section accreditation requires a mixture of education, experience, and examinations (for the Pathologist). The program is administered by the AFS on a voluntary basis. These individuals are not licensed by states, however, some states have set legal requirements for individuals to be accredited by AFS in order to carry out the states' laws on aquatic animals. There are a few veterinarians that are both licensed by states and are AFS-accredited. There appears to be little motivation for veterinarians who are already licensed to seek accreditation by AFS.

A discussion was held on how the needs of industry were currently being met. There seems to be a patchwork of public and private professionals. In some instances, public agencies are assisting private industry. It would be cost-prohibitive for many small producers to use the services of a private veterinarian for all of their health program needs. It appears that the current system of using a mix of professionals makes sense. It is unknown how much the industry will grow and thus, the needs for health professionals. It was pointed out that veterinarians are not needed or feasible for all situations, particularly routine sample collection for laboratory testing. For others, such as export health certificates, a veterinarian must oversee sample collection but does not necessarily need to be on-site every day samples are taken. We discussed the catfish industry, the largest aquaculture producer in the U.S., unfortunately, we did not have anyone from catfish country to identify their regular needs for fish health professionals. It was suggested that perhaps a questionnaire circulated to the aquaculture industry, private and public, would be helpful in identifying future needs for health professionals.

Licensing by states was discussed and what constitutes the practice of veterinary medicine. Most state acts identify the "diagnosis and treatment of animals and surgery" as the practice of veterinary medicine. Not all states include fish or shellfish in that definition. Licensing by states could be an issue for tribal and federal employees who may not fall under the purview of state regulations.

Examples were considered from other countries. The government of Norway recognizes trained and accredited professionals, who are not veterinarians, to practice aquatic animal medicine. This need developed because of economic reasons and availability of trained individuals who were not veterinarians.

Day 1 ended with the group struggling a little bit on how we identify the roles and needs for health professionals, particularly that the realm of aquatic animals ranges from zooplankton to whales.

Day 2 started with examining specific examples of how professionals might be utilized with the objective of the whole group dissecting the scenarios and determining if they have applicability to the US.

Scenario One - Development of a state-licensed sampler (possibly non-veterinarian) who collects samples and submits to lab for all purposes, i.e., surveillance, routine monitoring, export health certificates. The "licensed sampler" might work: a) under direct supervision of a veterinarian; b) under a government/regulatory agency; or, c) completely independent. The group imagined that all three scenarios could work, however, export certifications issued by APHIS currently must have samples collected under the supervision of a veterinarian. There was discussion as to whether the veterinarian must be present on the premises during sample collection....APHIS protocols indicate that the veterinarian should be present, however, this may not be feasible for most companies that export live products.

Scenario Two - Laboratory personnel conducting testing for surveillance and export certificates would be required to be accredited along with the laboratory they work in.

Currently, APHIS has a laboratory approval program for labs conducting testing for surveillance and exports. The credentials of the laboratory staff are examined by the AVIC when conducting the lab review within the specifications in the APHIS-required laboratory QA/QC manual. It does not appear necessary that the lab staff are licensed or accredited, as is required by the AFS/FHS program for individuals conducting sampling/testing. The APHIS program, whereby laboratories are approved, has merit.

Concern - Are APHIS personnel who conduct visits and make a determination as to whether a laboratory is qualified to conduct aquatic work qualified themselves to make such an assessment? Not all APHIS people currently conducting lab reviews are adequately trained in aquatics. It was suggested that a training program be established and/or inspections be conducted with qualified experts assisting APHIS staff. Qualified experts may be from

another federal agency such as FWS, NOAA Fisheries, or by qualified individuals from private industry.

Scenario Three - Licensed veterinarians would be responsible for the diagnosis, treatment, and surgery for all aquatic animals except for diagnosis and treatment by owners or government/tribal employees on their own fish or for research.

This scenario seems to be the norm and the model to be followed in the future

Scenario Four - USDA/APHIS accredited veterinarians would be required to demonstrate proficiency in aquatics prior to conducting legal activities related to USDA, such as issuing an export health certificate.

Current USDA-accredited veterinarian program does not include required training or testing on aquatics. While many training opportunities exist, skills and knowledge, such as those now required for other animals for APHIS-approved veterinarians, are non-existent for aquatics. Work by the Task Force/APHIS needs to focus soon on the development of such a program for aquatics.

Scenario Five - Veterinarians wishing to be licensed to practice aquatic medicine would be required to pass exams of an "aquatics specialty board" similar to board certification for surgery or pathology or pass an exam similar to the one required for accreditation by AFS/FHS.

Veterinarians working in aquatics have received their training and experience through number of channels; however, there is not currently a "board certification" for aquatics. While such a system may make sense in the future, it does not make sense now. Also, aquatics are quite challenging as there so many different species groups to consider. Focus for specialty programs should be on marine mammals, finfish, mollusks, and crustaceans. Having such "specialties" could be helpful for clients and veterinarians.

Summary of issues to consider for NAAHP:

- < Opportunities exist currently for aquatic animal health professionals, veterinarians and non-veterinarians alike. They need to work together to provide services to public and private aquaculture.
- < The demand for health professionals in the future is unclear. The NAAHP and associated surveillance programs along with industry will drive the demand. The need of the industry in the future is not clear as we were not clear on the needs of the current largest aquaculture industry in the US (catfish) nor were we able to determine how much aquaculture will grow in the US in the next 10 to 20 years. The largest opportunity seems to be in the EEZ.
- < There seems to be merit in developing a program by which samples are collected such as is done by the NPIP program. It does not make sense physically or economically for all sampling to be conducted by veterinarians in person.
- < The diagnosis, treatment, and surgery for aquatic animals considered livestock will be accomplished by licensed veterinarians. Education and training of health professionals will be considered in another element of NAAHP, however, it is clear that these individuals must demonstrate competence in their field.
- < APHIS, in cooperation with its Federal partners and veterinary schools, must expand its accredited veterinarian program to include aquatics. Applicants must pass appropriate tests before being accredited for aquatics. This program needs to be developed ASAP.
- < The NPIP is a program that could be useful in identifying roles for professionals in NAAHP.
- < As the roles for aquatic animal health professionals evolve, AFS/FHS may wish to re-examine its accreditation program to fit in with NAAHP and the Nation's needs.

Next steps:

Input from WG 1 will be used in drafting portions of Chapter 5 of NAAHP relating to roles and accreditation of professionals. This draft portion of Chapter 5 will be completed sometime in 2004. There does not appear at this time a need to re-convene WG 1.

Feedback from participants:

Based on the workshop evaluation forms, the participants gave the workshop high ratings and felt that the workshop achieved its objectives (see attached blank evaluation form). Specific additional comments were:

- < Concerns about funding supplied by Federal agencies being adequate for labs, infrastructure, etc.
- < Feeling that there could have been more representation from industry, esp. catfish. (Note* Unfortunately Carole Engle was unable to attend due to a family emergency. She would have helped broaden the group's

- perspective as it related to catfish/baitfish industries. Her input will be sought via this report.)
- < Liked the approach where scenarios were considered in order to establish roles.
 - < Appreciated the candor and transparency of the process.
 - < Education and training will be key components of NAAHP as it relates to professional roles and accreditation. Will need to keep AFS and AVMA involved in this aspect.
 - < It would be helpful if travel funds had been available to participants.
 - < Industry needs to drive NAAHP...Feds need to avoid perception that it is government-driven.
 - < Organizing committee did a good job selecting the WG 1 team.
 - < The use of a questionnaire to identify future needs was supported.
 - < Develop a flow chart to hand out to work group participants so that they better understand the process of NAAHP development and the role of working groups (Note* - Perhaps a PPT with flow charts at the beginning of work group meetings would be helpful to explain NAAHP and process for development).
 - < US Animal Health Association (USAHA) provides a mechanism that may assist in moving many of these items forward.